



**Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University
Faculty of Humanities**

**The Relationship between Listening Proficiency
and Metacognitive Listening Strategies Awareness
among Low and Highly Self-Regulated Learners**

By: Sajjad Abedi

**Supervisor: Dr. M. Rahimi
Reader: Dr. M. Meshkat**

**A thesis submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

June 2013

In the Name of GOD



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Dedication

To my beloved family whose unconditional love, encouragement, and support enabled me to realize my academic dream.

To my great professor, Dr. Mehrak Rahimi whose endless and ongoing support enabled me to do my best during my academic journey.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thank goes to Dr. Mehrak Rahimi for her kindness, patience, support, encouragement and her valuable insights throughout different stages of this study and her valuable scholarly comments that greatly shaped my work.

I am also grateful to Dr. Maryam Meshkat for her kindness and cooperation that helped this research project move through the first stages to final stages of completion.

Special mention and gratitude go to Dr. Reza Nejati for his kindness, support, valuable comments, admirable patience and professional manner through different stages of my academic career. I would also like to thank Dr. Farhad Ghorban-Dordi-Nejad for his kind assistance and advice throughout my MA course.

I would also like to thank Dr. Farideh Hamidi, for her kindness, encouragements, and support during my BA and MA courses.

I also wish to thank the contributions and help of all the Directors, Principals, Teachers, and Students from Khansar Education Office who participated in the study or helped in the data collection. I am grateful to them all.

Abstract

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between listening proficiency and metacognitive listening strategies awareness among low, mid, and highly self-regulated students. Three hundred and seventy one EFL students participated in this study (all grade 3 and 4 high-school students who were studying in Khansar in academic year 1391-92). To gather the data, three instruments including Preliminary English Test (PET) (listening part), Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), and Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (ASRQ) were used. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (correlation analysis and multiple regression). The results revealed that, when the whole sample was considered, there was a significant relationship between listening proficiency and one type of metacognitive strategies, that is problem-solving ($r=.170$, $p<.01$). While language proficiency was not related to either MALQ or its subsections among highly self-regulated learners, it was related to one type of metacognitive strategies, mental translation strategies ($r=.198$, $p<.05$), among low self-regulated learners. Further, language proficiency was found to be related to MALQ ($r=.272$, $p<.01$) and its three subsections, namely planning-evaluation ($r=.259$, $p<.01$), directed attention ($r=.197$, $p<.05$), and problem solving ($r=.322$, $p<.01$) among mid self-regulated learners. In addition, regression analysis demonstrated that problem solving strategies could predict more than 10% of the variance of listening proficiency among mid self-regulated learners. The findings of the study has certain implications for teachers, policy makers and the ministry of education to provide opportunities for implementing language learning strategies in EFL classes.

Key Terms: Listening proficiency, Metacognitive listening strategies, Self-regulation

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

LLS: Language Learning Strategies

MALQ: Metacognitive Awareness of Listening Questionnaire

PET: preliminary English Test

SRL: Self-Regulated Learning

ASRQ: Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Chapter One

Introduction

Listening comprehension is the most difficult skill for EFL learners (e.g. Graham, 2002) and thus many scholars have underlined the significance of teaching listening comprehension over other language skills in the EFL curriculum (e.g., Feyten, 1991, Vandergrift, 1997). In order to clarify the processes involved in listening comprehension, some studies have tried to investigate how listening occurs and what factors are involved in the process of listening comprehension.

While early models of listening comprehension considered listening as a passive process, researchers such as Clark and Clark (1977) emphasized the interactive nature of listening and highlighted the cognitive and affective factors that are involved in the process of listening. Roost (2002) also emphasized the role of both linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge in listening comprehension and recognized two kinds of processes that listeners use in comprehending a text (oral or written), that is top-down and bottom up processing. It is now believed that listening is an active process through which sounds are discriminated, vocabulary and structural patterns are understood, and paralinguistic features are interpreted while all of them will be retained and interpreted within a particular socio-cultural context (Vandergrift, 1999).

In line with this, follow-up studies have been carried out to investigate factors that affect language learners' listening comprehension. Their results show that factors such as pictorial support, word recognition skills, bottom-up skills, speech rate, grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, advance organizers, content and context visuals, availability of DVD video with multilingual sound track, self- efficacy, and learners' beliefs and schema activation all affect listening comprehension and its development as a language skill (Jones & Plass, 2002; Segalowitz, 1993; Osade, 2001; Zhao, 1997; Meccarty, 2000; Herron, Cole, York & Linden, 1998; Ginther, 2002; Long, 1990; Cotterall and Victory, 1999; Graham, 2005).

With the emergence of humanism and its focus on the individualized autonomous learner, many researchers began to study factors which may help learners facilitate their own learning processes and to achieve their desired objectives. It was at this time that scholars started to pay more attention to metacognition and metacognitive processes that learners use in their learning process. According to Flavell (1970) metacognition is "cognition about cognitive phenomena or more simply thinking about thinking" (Flavell, 1970, p.906). As metacognition is the "awareness and management of one's own thought" (Kuhn & Dean, 2004, p.270), without conscious awareness of the processes involved in learning a language learners will not be able to make sound decisions about their learning (Sinclair, 2000). In line with these propositions, several researchers have tried to investigate the role of metacognition in language achievement. Wafa (2003), Young and Fry (2008), and Yang (2009) all found that there is a positive relationship between the use of metacognitive strategies and achievement in English. In another study, Yang (2009) reported that there are differences in metacognitive strategies used by English listeners,

indicating that students with low achievement in English language use fewer metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Vandergrift (1997) found that intermediate listeners use a higher percentage of metacognitive strategies than do novice listeners. However, in contrast with Vandergrift's idea, Vann and Abraham (1990) suggest that effective and less effective learners use similar strategies but differ in the way they use them.

The general findings of studies on metacognition reveal that metacognitive strategies used by learners help them to regulate and oversee learning activities (Wenden, 1991). Based on these findings, the role of 'self-regulation' in language learning was highlighted by other researchers. Self-regulation is defined as the systematic efforts to direct thoughts, feelings, and actions toward the attainment of one's goal (Zimmerman, 2000). Several studies have been carried out in this framework to show how self-regulation may affect language achievement. It is shown that students who lack skills in self-regulation tend not only to achieve poor academic results, but also to have behavior problems and difficulties in their social relations (e.g., McGinnis & Goodstein, 1984). It is also reported that students with higher levels of overall self-regulation generally achieve higher levels of language achievement compared to students with weaker overall self-regulation (Smith, Borkowsky & Whitman, 2008). However, while there are several studies that have tried to investigate the role of self-regulation in learning a language, the role of self-regulation in listening strategies use and awareness in the process of language learning seems to be taken for granted in listening literature.

1.1 Statement of the problem

It is now believed that listening comprehension as the least explicit and the most difficult language skill to learn plays a key role in facilitating language learning (Goh, 2001; Vandergrift, 2003, 2004, 2005). In order to help language learners in the process of listening comprehension some language experts studied the way skillful listeners process oral input and demonstrated that language learning strategies may have great impact on learners' listening skill. In addition, strategy instruction was found to have great influence on listening comprehension performance of second language learners (Rubin, 1998; Thompson & Rubin, 1996) in helping them pay greater attention to listening tasks and managing their opportunities to listen.

Recent studies on differences in strategy use between effective and less effective listeners provide support for the critical role metacognitive strategies play in improving language learning in general and listening comprehension in particular (Vandergrift, 2004; Goh, 2003). In other words, those language learners who are aware of their metacognitive abilities are more effective learners and consequently have increased achievement compared with other learners (Pressley, Jones & Surry, 1990).

While metacognitive knowledge of learning strategies has been recognized as an important factor in language learning, in contrast to the numerous studies on learning strategies, research on metacognitive strategies awareness in language learning has been relatively scant. Of special relevance, is the relationship between metacognition and self-regulation in language learning. Therefore, the current study will investigate the effect of metacognitive strategies awareness on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners considering their level of self-regulation.

1.2 Significance of the study

As mentioned before, metacognitive knowledge (including metacognitive strategies awareness) plays an important role in learners' different cognitive activities (Vandergrift, 2004). Research into metacognitive awareness about listening is relatively new. Nevertheless, findings to date show that language learners demonstrate some degree of metacognitive awareness about themselves as second language listeners and the listening processes itself (Goh, 1997; Graham, 2006; Sinanu, Palupi, Anggraeni, & Hastuti, 2007). Some research findings show that metacognitive awareness of listening strategies is both related to achievement in English (Wafa, 2003; Young & Fry, 2008; Yang, 2009; Kummin & Rahman, 2010) and English listening proficiency (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2012). It has also been demonstrated that listening metacognitive strategies awareness is significantly correlated with motivation particularly with extrinsic motivation that is believed to be strongly correlated with language achievement (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Vandergrift, 2005; Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011). All these suggest that awareness and use of metacognitive strategies can help students capitalize on the language input they are receiving, manage their approach to listening (Vandergrift, 2004), focus on the language input they receive, and consequently enhance their performance on listening task.

On the other hand, learners who want to become successful language learners have to be autonomous and in charge of their own learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). For this reason, educators should assist learners to be aware of their own thinking and, to be strategic learners, and to direct their motivation toward valuable goals (Torrano & Torres, 2002) or simply become self-regulated.

As the goal of the present study is investigating the relationship between Iranian's EFL learners' metacognitive strategies awareness and their listening comprehension ability with regard to their self-regulation status, its findings will demonstrate how learners' listening metacognitive strategies awareness will contribute to enhancement of learners listening comprehension when learners' self-regulation is cared for (Vandergrift, 2007; Zeng 2007). The findings thus will support theoretical postulations on the relationship between metacognition and self-regulation (e.g., Son& Schwartz, 2004) and the role of both traits in developing a difficult language skill, that is, listening comprehension (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, &Tafaghodtari, 2006).

Further, the findings of the study will help educators and instructors about the needs of language learners and what should be done to induce them to self-regulate their learning in order to become autonomous and critical knowledge constructors (Boekaerts, Pintrich&Zeidner, 2000).

1.3 Research Questions

RQ1: Is there any relationship between metacognitive listening strategies awareness and listening proficiency?

RQ2: Is there any relationship between metacognitive listening strategies awareness and listening proficiency among highly self-regulated Iranian EFL learners?

RQ3: Is there any relationship between metacognitive listening strategy awareness and listening proficiency among low self-regulated Iranian EFL learners?

RQ4: Is there any relationship between metacognitive listening strategy awareness and listening proficiency among mid self-regulated Iranian EFL learners?

RQ5: Is there any difference between the power of metacognitive listening strategies awareness to predict listening proficiency among low, mid and highly-regulated EFL learners?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The research questions render themselves to the following hypotheses:

1. There is no relationship between metacognitive listening strategies awareness and listening proficiency.
2. There is no relationship between metacognitive listening strategies awareness and listening proficiency among highly self-regulated Iranian EFL learners.
3. There is no relationship between metacognitive listening strategies awareness and listening proficiency among low self-regulated Iranian EFL learners.
4. There is no relationship between metacognitive listening strategy awareness and listening proficiency among mid self-regulated Iranian EFL learners.
5. There is no difference between the power of metacognitive listening strategies awareness to predict listening proficiency among low, mid and highly-regulated EFL learners?

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Metacognitive listening strategies: According to Vandergrift and Goh (2006) metacognitive listening strategies are of five types including problem solving, planning and evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge and finally directed knowledge.

Metacognitive listening strategies awareness: Based on the theory of metacognition, metacognitive listening strategies awareness is the extent to which language learners are conscious of their strategies and can regulate the process of L2 listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2006, Cited in Rahimi&Katal, 2012).

Metacognitive awareness of listening strategies is measured in the current study by Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) (Vandergrift, 2006). MALQ contains 21 items consisting of five factors including problem solving (six items), planning and evaluation (five items), mental translation (three items), person knowledge (three items), and directed attention (four items).

Listening proficiency: Listening is a complex active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was perceived and interpret it within immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance (Vandergrift, 2011).

Listening proficiency is measured by PET (Preliminary English Test). The PET examination is part of a group of examinations developed by Cambridge ESOL called the Cambridge Main Suite. PET has three main sections including: reading, writing listening, and speaking. The listening part includes 4 parts ranging from short exchanges for longer dialogues and monologues. The objective of listening section is to assess candidates' ability to understand dialogues and monologues in both informal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics (PET, 2011, p.5).The listening part includes 25 items and lasts 35 minutes.